

HAL BALZAN

SUPPLEMENT TO SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION - JULY 1977

EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Welcome once again on the occasion of the colourful celebrations held in Balzan in honour of 'The Annunciation of Our Lady' better known as 'Il-Lunzjata'! So ardent is our desire that you share and share in these festivities, that for the second year running, we thought of devoting four pages of our Special Issue of 'HAL BALZAN' for your perusal. We feel certain that a general convergence of the tourists and festa lovers from all over the island will take place at Balzan on the evening of the 9th and on both morning and evening of the 10th July to partake of the entertainment offered by band marches, religious services, firework displays, and one thousand and one other festivities.

Philatelists, connoisseurs of art and history and all Balzanites (Balzanin, as the residents of Balzan are known) welcomed with interest the Stamp Issue of the Flemish tapestries of St. John's, issued by the General Post Office on the 30th March 1977. The interest of the latter group — the Balzanites — was mainly due to the fact that the lowest value (2c), used as inland letter rate, represented the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin or the Mystery of the Incarnation which is "the origin and foundation of the Catholic Church." Many are the residents of Balzan, who, though uninterested in philately, have bought the Set on First Day Cover and many others have mounted Blocks of this stamp, barely leaving space for the address, on letters going to their relatives in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to remind them of the Statue of the Annunciation at Balzan Parish Church, much treasured by the parishioners of Balzan, in honour of whom the forthcoming festivities will be celebrated. Tribute to this "large Picture, on the right of the Portrait Piece" as well as to the other priceless set of tapestries copied from cartoons by the Flemish Master Peter Paul Rubens (1577 — 1640) and donated by Grand Master Perellos to enhance the magnificence of St. John's, was paid by Dr. V.M. Pellegrini which he based on a pamphlet by Sir Ferdinand V. Inglott KCMG, published in 1893 and printed at the Malta Government Printing Office. At that time, Sir Ferdinand Inglott was "a member of the permanent Commission for the Preservation of the Public Pictures, the frescoes in the Government Palaces and the Pavement of St. John's Church". Dr. V.M. Pellegrini's article appeared in the Sunday Times of Malta of June 19th, 1977.

What a coincidence! The Tapestry Set was released on the 30th March, just five days after the liturgical feast of the Annunciation. At the beginning of the century, the Feast of the Annunciation used to be celebrated on the 25th March. The residents of Balzan, then about 1300, used to send letters to their relatives all over the island, inviting them to come to Balzan to enjoy the Village Festa.

Several copies of stamps obliterated with the Balzan cancellor at the Balzan Postal Agency, in Main Street, then Strada Reale, bear the dates March 5th — March 22nd, which confirms that the letters bearing these stamps were nothing but invitations for the Village Festa. Until a few years, the Feast of the Annunciation was celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, but now it is being celebrated with great pomp on the second Sunday in July.

This Editorial ushers in gay moments for all to partake of; may you have a very enjoyable FESTA — Oh! Hark ye Readers! Listen to the harmonious bells on the majestic belfry of Balzan Church welcoming you most cordially to the Feast of the Annunciation; join in the chorus — VIVA IL-LUNZJATA!!!

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ALTAR PIECE OF THE ANNUNCIATION — BALZAN HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROGRAMME OF FESTIVITIES IN HONOUR OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY

Sunday, 3rd July:

8.15 p.m. The Statue of the Annunciation is taken out of its niche and exposed in the Church. Musical Programme by the St. Gabriel Band, and fireworks.

Friday, 8th July:

6.00 p.m. Vespers and Mass with Homily, Litany, Antiphon and Eucharistic Celebration (as on Wednesday and Thursday).
8.30 p.m. Marches by the St. Gabriel Band and the 12th May Band, of Zebbug.

Saturday, 9th July:

7.00 p.m. Translation of the Relic of Our Lady, conducted by His Grace Mgr. Joseph Mercieca, Metropolitan Archbishop of Malta.
7.30 p.m. Concelebrated Pontifical High Mass, conducted by His Grace Mgr. Antonio Del Guidice, Apostolic Nuncio. Eucharistic Celebration.
8.00 p.m. Marches and Musical Programmes by the St. Gabriel Band and the St. Catherine Band, of Zurrieq.
10.30 p.m. Colour rockets and fireworks in Annunciation Street.

Sunday, 10th July:

8.45 a.m. Concelebrated High Mass with Homily.
9.30 a.m. Marches by the 12th May Band of Zebbug.
5.30 p.m. Marches and Musical Programmes by the King's Own Band, of Valletta, and the Count Roger Band, of Rabat.
6.30 p.m. Vespers and Compline.
7.30 p.m. Procession with the Statute of the Annunciation, Antiphon, and Eucharistic Celebration.
During and after the procession, colour and Spanish rockets will be let off.
10.00 p.m. Marches by the St. Gabriel Band.

THE PROCESSIONAL STATUE OF THE ANNUNCIATION

The people of Balzan were really fortunate to acquire fine works of art representing the Annunciation for their church. The annual feast of their parish church gives us the occasion to admire two paintings and two statues, one carved in stone erected in front of the church, and another carved in wood inside the church, the latter being the subject of our main attention on this festive day. However, a small note about the other three works may also be included for the benefit of all concerned.

To begin with, one should say that the stone figures of Our Lady and the Angel in front of the church are two masterpieces by Vincenzo Dimech (1802) worthy to be among the exhibits of our National Museum of Fine Arts. It is one of our best examples of Baroque sculpture.

Another fine Baroque work was the old altarpiece which now is found decorating the ceiling of one of the church sacristies. It is the work of Carlo Dimech, sometimes also called Zimech, who flourished in the 17th century, but unfortunately he is very little known among us.

The present altarpiece in the church apse is the work of Giuseppe Calleja (1857) carried out upon the sketches by Hyzler, who, in fact, was the leading artist of his time. But Hyzler was, at the same time, a fanatic enemy of Baroque art and is accused of destroying the old ornamentations in the French Chapel in St. John's Church in Valletta and of replacing the same with neoclassic carvings that greatly clash with the Baroque character of the 16th century

by
R. BONNICI CALI'

church.

However, Hyzler compensated for his errors by fostering the study of Neoclassics and the Pre-Raphaelite spirit in sacred art among the local art students, one of whom was Salvatore Dimech, the sculptor of the processional statue of the Annunciation in Balzan Church.

The Sculptor

Salv. Dimech, commonly called "is-Sartx" as everybody had a nickname at that time, was born at Mosta in 1805, and lived up to 1887, leaving behind him a number of fine works.

During his youth, he moved to Lija, where he found the humble employment as a herdsman, but the lad had an artistic talent and spent his leisure in carving various figures in stone with the aid of a pocket-knife. These little naive works had accidentally drawn the attention of an established sculptor, a certain

Sigismondo Dimech, perhaps one of Salvatore's kinsmen, and the generous Sigismondo took the youth under his care and made of him a worthy pupil.

After some time, the rustic sculptor was also patronised by Giuseppe Hyzler, who furnished him with sketches for the works that display the Pre-Raphaelite character. These are the stone statues of St. Gregory at Zejtun, 1838; Our Lady of the Scapular on the corner of the Carmelite Church, in Old Theatre Street Valletta; the Immaculate Conception on the corner of St. Francis Convent, in Strait Street; the figures of L'Isle Adam and La Vallette in the niches of the City Main Gate (now destroyed); and the Apostles in the side niches of the apse at Attard Parish Church.

Besides, Salv. Dimech produced a number of other stone statues upon which he showed himself both eclectic and a good copyist. Examples of this type are those of St. Paul in a side square at Lija; St. Joseph in a small square at Mosta; and St. Peter and St. Paul at Nadur Square.

He also successfully tried his hand at papier-maché, producing the group of the Crucifixion that is carried in procession on Good Friday, in Valletta.

However, his highest ambition was reached on being commissioned to carve in wood the processional statues of the Assumption of Our Lady for his native village, Mosta, now destroyed, and the Annunciation for Balzan, in 1868.

Eventually, in both cases, he strived to be original and personal in style. By now he found himself free from the impositions of his patron G. Hyzler, who had died ten years earlier than the inauguration of the same works. Now the poor shepherd could claim himself to be a fully-fledged artist. In fact, Dimech's Annunciation, which is the only surviving example of the master's wood carving, displays a particular composition, good modelling, and, above all, a true Christian character, which on the whole may be classed among the best examples of local sacred art.

For historic accuracy, one should also say that, in 1929, the Annunciation statue has been redecorated with gilding, while the Angel's wings have also been enlarged and the original pedestal has been added with a few ornamentations; but, on the whole, the work still displays the fine qualities of Salvatore Dimech.



Salvatore Dimech's Annunciation — Balzan

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A "WELCOME" FROM OUR PARISH PRIEST

As the person mainly responsible for the organization of the Parish Feast, I feel I must, first of all, thank the Editorial Board of "Hal Balzan" for inviting me to address myself to the foreign friends who will be amongst us during our parish's Festa, and especially to those of them who have made their home in our village or its surroundings.

I think it would not be out of place for me to explain to those who are new to Malta or who are here on holiday, the make-up of our Festas. First of all, I must say that the nucleus, the core, of the feast are the Church celebrations, for five whole days, as one may readily see from the programme printed with this paper. From Wednesday evening to Sunday our Church is really at her best, and she dons her best clothes, inviting one and all to pay her a visit. The liturgical celebrations which take place during these five days are held with the solemnity such an occasion demands. For this we invite, and are assisted, by priests from other Parishes, who take part in the functions, deliver sermons, hear confession, and so on. As a rule, our Archbishop, or one of the Bishops residing in Malta, also takes part in the Church celebrations. The liturgical part of the feast comes to its conclusion with a solemn procession on Sunday evening.

The other part of the programme of festivities is the social or popular celebration, which consists of band marches and programmes, street decorations, fireworks, etc. In our Parish this is organized by the two main Clubs of the village, who take great pains to see that everything is done as best as possible. As is clear, this is not an essential part of the Festa, but it is a very important and integral one. Our people, who rejoice in the glory of Our Blessed Mother Mary, feel that they must show their joy also externally, and so help each other to give glory to God through the honour they show towards His Son's Mother.

You are sincerely welcome to our Feast, inside and outside the Church. We all form part of the people of God, redeemed by Jesus, made man in the virgin womb of our common Mother. May she help us all to unite in her glory and in the adoration of the Blessed Trinity.

Can. CARM. SCIBERRAS

The Trapper

Sweet little bird!
I love your happy strain.
I love the colours on your throbbing chest.

But this is not a healthy place;
Go back to your nest,
Take the freckled grapes from the withery vine
And fly away.

Pray! do not sing aloud
Lest the trapper should hear your sound;
He will keep you in a tiny cage,
Where you will pine and die so soon of rage.

Fly away to the forest green,
Where you may sing by day and rest by night,
Where man cannot show his arrogance and his
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BALZAN STREET NAMES

An important facet of the history of a town or village is the study of its street names. Local street names provide such an interesting study because they furnish us with a great deal of information about the geographical position of a particular town or village on the island, about its past events and prominent people, as well as about its patron saints. In this short article, I shall attempt to give a bird's eye view of the street names of Balzan and their relation to the history of the village. This is not meant to be a comprehensive survey of the subject, but I hope that the general reader will be able to appreciate better that which is so much taken for granted in everyday life, such as the names of the streets where we live.

Our brief survey takes us first to the central and older part of the village, characterised by narrow, winding streets and blind alleys. Here we find some of the earliest houses and buildings which date back to the times when Balzan still formed part of the larger Parish of Birkirkara. Balzan was erected a separate Parish on the 14th August 1655. These first buildings were set up in two distinct areas of Balzan: in the upper part of the village, around the small church of the Assumption of Our Lady, and in the lower part of the village, around the old church of the Annunciation. These two building sites were so distinct that they were referred to as "in-naħa ta' fuq" (the upper part) and "in-naħa t'isfel" (the lower part) respectively, and prior to 1655 a priest from the Parish

BY CARMEL BEZZINA B.A.

of Birkirkara was sent on Sundays and days of obligation to say Mass alternately, once in the church of the Annunciation and once in that of the Assumption, or Santa Marija. (1)

St. Mary Street

The oldest streets in Balzan are, therefore, those found in these two areas. St. Mary Street lies just behind the church of the Assumption, which is one of the finest of the small churches of Balzan. This church was built in 1846 (2) on the same site where two previous churches, also dedicated to St. Mary, had been built, the first in 1574 (3) and the second one in 1675. (4)

Three Churches Street

The old church of the Annunciation is flanked by two other small churches; one is dedicated to St. Leonard, patron saint of slaves, and the other is dedicated to St. Roque, and was built by the people of Balzan as a sign of thanksgiving to the saint for having delivered the village from the plague of 1592/1593. (5) These three churches built near each other gave the name to Three Churches Street, even though unfortunately today the church of St. Leonard has been converted to a private house. Formerly, this street was known as Old Parish Street (6) on account of the fact that the old church of the Annunciation served as the Parish Church of Balzan from the 14th August 1655 (when Balzan became a separate Parish) to the 26th January 1695 (when the new Parish Church began to be used).

Providence Street

Two other old streets in this area are St. Roque Street and Providence Street. The latter may have taken its name from the life-size stone statue known as "Il-Madonna tar-Rummiena" (Our Lady of the Pomegranate), set up at the very beginning of Providence Street, corner with Main Street. This statue shows the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus who is holding a pomegranate in his hand, a symbol of heavenly providence towards mankind. This statue is very dear to the people of Balzan who treasure it with care and devotion.

Main Street

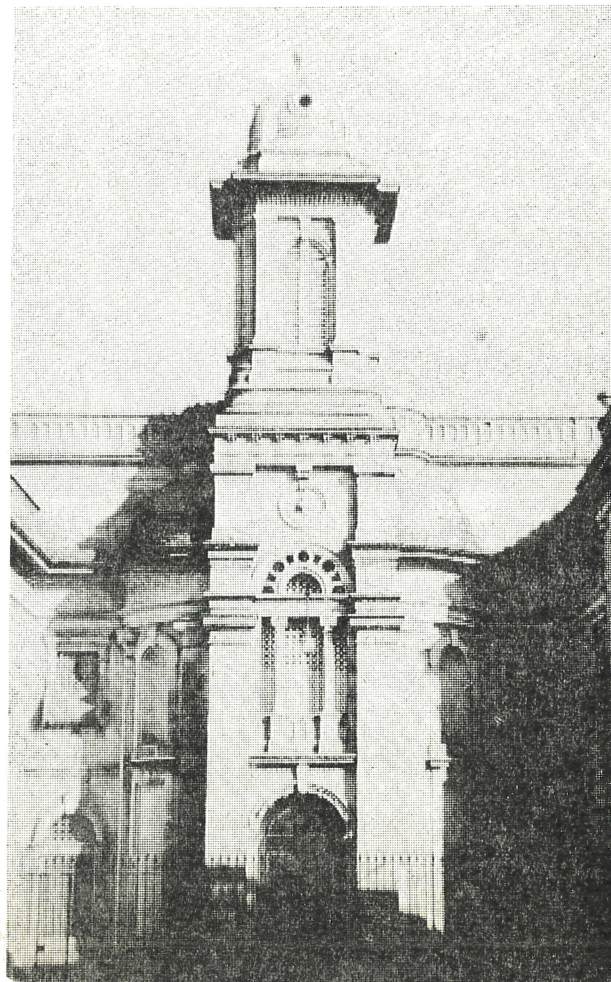
When the people of Balzan came to build the new Parish Church in 1669, because the old one proved too small for an ever increasing population, they chose the very centre of the village, that is half way between the two churches previously mentioned. In this way, the new Parish Church united the upper and lower parts of the village. The small churches of the Annunciation and St. Mary lost most of their importance, and the new church immediately became the focal point of village life. The street which led to the new church became the principal street of the village — Main or High Street (formerly Strada Reale). This street runs through the whole village: in it are found most of the clubs and social centres of Balzan, and the main religious and public activities of the

village take place there. Main Street is also the main route for public transport.

lentine has become a very popular saint in Balzan and his feast in July is celebrated with great pomp, second only to the feast of the Annunciation.

Sisters of the Good Shepherd and Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

Other streets which bear religious names are Good Shep-



The facade of Good Shepherd Convent in Idmejda Street.

St. Valentine Street

The patron saints of the village, so dear to the people of Balzan, have streets named after them as well. Annunciation Street recalls the titular patron of Balzan, and St. Valentine Street brings to mind the 4th century Christian martyr whose remains are venerated in the village Parish Church. The corpse of this martyr was brought in 1784 from St. Helena's Cemetery in Rome by the Rt. Rev. Mgr. Lawrence Grech Delicata, and donated to Balzan Parish Church on the 26th January 1820. (7) Since then, St. Va-

herd Avenue, St. Francis Street and St. Anthony Street. Good Shepherd Avenue is one of the new streets of the village, and its name is a partial tribute to the sterling services rendered by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who came to Malta from Smirna in 1858 and settled in Balzan for good in 1868. Here they built their spacious monastery as well as their chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. (8) In St. Francis Street are found the convent and school of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who settled here in 1911 — hence the street name. (9)

(continued on page IV)



The shrine of the "Madonna tar-Rummiena" (Our Lady of Divine Providence)

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BALZAN STREET NAMES

(continued from page III)

San Anton Gardens and Grand Master De Paule

We have two streets in Balzan called after St. Anthony, and they are often referred to as the 'Upper' and the 'Lower'. Both lead to Attard. These streets enclose San Anton Gardens and, like the latter, bear the name-sake of Grand Master Antoine De Paule (1623-1636), who laid out these magnificent gardens and built San Anton Palace as his country residence. Grand Master De Paule is recalled also in De Paule Avenue, a very fine two-way avenue facing the lower entrance to San Anton Gardens.

Pope Alexander VII

The names of prominent people feature as well in the list of Balzan street names. Pope Alexander VII Junction is named after the Pope during whose pontificate (1655-1667) Balzan became a separate Parish. It is interesting to point out that Alexander VII, before rising to this highest position in the Roman Catholic Church, was an Inquisitor here in Malta as Fabio Chigi.

Frater Doctor Joseph Zammit

Dr. Zammit Street takes its name from Frater Doctor Joseph Zammit (1650-1740) who lies buried in the village Parish Church. Dr. Zammit was the first holder of the Chair of Anatomy and Surgery founded by Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner in 1676. Though not a Balzanite himself, Dr. Zammit's parents and grand-parents all hailed from this village. Moreover, Dr. Zammit set up a foundation in favour of the altar of St. Paul the Hermit, which is in the south transept of Balzan Parish Church, for the annual celebration of the feast of the saint on January 26th. (10)

Sir Michelangelo Refalo (1876-1923)

Sir Michelangelo Refalo Avenue brings to mind the famous Gozitan jurist who was at one time Chief Justice and President of H.M.'s Court

of Appeal, as well as Vice-President of the Council of Government. Sir M.A. Refalo's relation with Balzan is that he built his splendid Villa Refalo on the outskirts of the village. Later on, Villa Refalo, with a modern complex adjoining it at the back, was converted into the luxurious Corinthia Palace Hotel.

Parish Priest Sisner

The small street facing Good Shepherd Convent bears the name of the only Parish Priest of Balzan who left his name in the list of the village street names. Sisner Street reminds us of the Rev. Amabile Sisner, who was Parish Priest of Balzan between the years 1896 and 1923. Apart from being a very zealous and saintly priest, Sisner was a prolific writer who left a great deal of devotional literature in Maltese. (11)

Old Railway Road

Old Railway Road, most commonly known as "Il-Linja" in Maltese, registers for future generations the use of the railway as a means of transport here in Malta. The Malta Railway started operating on the 28th February 1883 and provided transport between Valletta and Mtarfa, passing through Hamrun, Birkirkara, Balzan and Attard. It stopped functioning in 1931. (12)

Idmejdja Street

A street whose old name is of very doubtful origin is Idmejdja Street. Formerly, this was an alley — "Sqaq Dmejdja" (13) — which may have taken its name from the nick-name of the family who might have lived there. According to Erin Serracino Inglott (14), the word 'Dmejdja' in Maltese is a plural or diminutive formed from the Semitic triliteral root D-M-D. From this root, we have 'madmad', which Dozy (15) explains as 'a strap, usually of leather, to keep oxen tied to their yoke'. The word 'Dmejdja' may be plausibly explained thus, especially



The
St. Gabriel
Band
at
Wardija.

when we bear in mind that at the very end of this alley there was a large farm which had been bequeathed to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. (16) Remains of this farm-house can still be seen in Idmejdja Street, corner with Pope Alexander VII Junction. However, one cannot be too sure about the exact origin of this street name.

Notabile and Naxxar Road

The streets which remain are Balzan Valley, Notabile Road, and Naxxar Road. The former one points to the nature of the street itself, namely that it channels the rain water coming down from the neighbouring Lija, Mosta and Naxxar to Valley Road in Birkirkara. On the other hand, Notabile Road and Naxxar Road give Balzan its exact geographical position on the island, placed as it is between the two main roads — Valletta-Rabat and Valletta-Mosta/Naxxar. Both roads pass through other neighbouring towns and villages. Notabile Road ("It-Triq tar-Rabat" in Maltese) is known also as "Mdina Road"; it was King Alfonso of Castille who gave the title of 'Città Notabile' to the old capital city of Malta on the 20th June 1428. (17)

To round up this rapid look at the names of the streets in our native village, we need hardly emphasize the historical richness which lies in local street names. We do earnestly hope that the names which will be given in future to our new streets will only contribute to this wealth handed to us by our forefathers.

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- (4) Dimech, G.: Ibid. No. 11.
- (5) Bonnici, Art.: History of the Church in Malta Vol. II, p. 72.
- (6) Dimech, G.: Ibid. No. 2.
- (7) Ferris, Achille: Descrizione Storica della Chiesa di Malta e Gozo Ch. CXLVIII, p. 509.
- (8) Guillaumier, Alf.: Bliet u Rhula Maltin p. 17.
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- (15) Dozy, R.: Supplement aux dictionnaires Arabes (Leide 1927).
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25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ST. GABRIEL BAND

The St. Gabriel Club was founded in the year 1920. Its main aim was to help in the external festivities which are held in honour of Our Lady of the Annunciation, titular feast of our village. Besides this, the committee of this club has never failed to create a happy atmosphere among its members, and has organised social, cultural and religious activities to foster happiness and enjoyment within the club premises. These activities, held from time to time, were a success, and I may quite frankly say that the committee has reached its aim in turning the club into one big, happy family. Yet the lack of musical activities had always been felt, and the idea had always been playing on the minds of those who wished that such activities would one day be introduced. But there wasn't anyone who dared take the initiative and set the ball rolling.

Thirty one years had to pass until a staunch young lad came out with the idea of having a band of musicians in the club. This energetic youth of twenty two years was Mr. Gabriel Caruana, now the president of our club, an artist and ceramist full of new ideas and well known in Malta for his creative works of art. It was in the year 1951 when Mr. Caruana put forward his proposal to the club's committee asking that the club should have a band of musicians. His proposal was seconded by another young man, Mr. Joe Felice. A general meeting was held in August 1951, and the majority decided that the club should have a band of musicians. Without loss of time, the committee contacted Mr. Carmelo Briffa of Birkirkara to take charge of the new band. He became the first bandmaster.

From then on, the St. Gabriel Club took the name of "St. Gabriel Band Club" and was affiliated to the Malta Band Clubs Association. The new band made its first public appearance with a musical programme held in a fair to raise funds for the external festivities on the 23rd March 1952 near Villa Macedonia in St. Valentine Street. Later on that same year, it

played band marches and performed musical programmes for the first time during the village festa. Mro. Carmelo Briffa conducted the band for twenty years till his death in April 1972. The committee, then, soon employed another bandmaster — Mro. Clemente Sciberras A.Mus. L.C.M. — who became the second bandmaster. Though he lives in Balzan, he hails from Birkirkara and conducts the St. Helena Band of that town.

Ever since its foundation, our band has always taken part in the external festivities held annually in our village. It plays band marches and performs musical programmes during the three days of the festa. It has always played on the feast day of St. Valentine Martyr. Our band celebrates the liturgical feast of the Annunciation on the 25th March by parading the main streets of the village. During the lifetime of the Noble Count Bernard Manduca, who used to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of the Forsaken at Wardija, our band used to take part in the outdoor celebrations there. It has also taken part in the celebrations of other town and village feasts held all over the island.

Valentino Muscat.

CORDINA HALL

CARMEL STREET, BIRKIRKARA

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